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PRESENT-DAY NEEDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION¹

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THE CONSTITUTIONAL PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

I hope to interest you this evening in our great national need of a more specific and intensive influence of higher education upon the masses of the population.

The ultimate legal purpose of all our education in the United States is now, and always has been, social organization and betterment. That was the assigned justification and purpose of our early colonial legislation; it is the ground upon which charters for private foundations have been sought; it has been the continuing purpose of a great mass of legislation down to our own day. Our ancestors in 1647 did not set up a public-school system as a co-operative enterprise for the education of their children, but in order "that learning may not be buried in the grave of our fathers"—a social purpose.

Through the long years, when the constitutional right of the state to enforce compulsory education laws, to maintain high schools, normal schools, and universities was being assailed, a long series of decisions of the courts of last resort affirmed and reaffirmed the principle that the state might make very large use of its powers in the support of education so long as the

¹ Address delivered at the Thirty-First Educational Conference of the Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, May 8, 1919.

purpose of education was held to be the safety of the commonwealth. So compelling has been this line of reasoning, that the constitutional right of the state to maintain education of any desired extent whatsoever has ceased to be seriously questioned. So it has come to pass that the social purpose of education has become the recognized purpose, not only in the minds of educational thinkers, but also in the whole body of our law.

INEVITABLE SOCIAL EFFECT OF EDUCATION

Before proceeding to the main topic, I ask your indulgence in the review of certain typical instances which show how inevitable is the effect of education upon the character of the population.

The first case is that of the Madawaska territory, so called, in the state of Maine. A considerable section of what is now the northern part of that state was assigned to the United States by the Webster-Ashburton treaty of 1842. The state found itself, in consequence, exercising jurisdiction over a population which was alien in race, in language, in civil institutions, and economic life. The region was further separated from the seat of government by two hundred miles of wilderness, and was not brought within direct rail communication until the closing years of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the state established a system of common schools admirably calculated to Americanize the population. Within two generations the effect had become so marked that today you can see how a distinctly different civilization distinguishes these people from their kindred across the St. John River, who have grown up under a different system of schools, but whose life is not otherwise different.

The instance is of course typical of our whole Americanization history, a process unnoticed and taken for granted but, when you think of it, as stupendous a piece of engineering as

any of those works which change the face of Nature and astonish the world.

Another instance which seems clear is that of the comparatively sudden crystallization of the public conviction which has led to the adoption of the eighteenth amendment. For many years the liquor question had been a live issue, but almost everywhere a local issue. Maine and Kansas were the only states in which even states as wholes seemed committed to state-wide prohibition as a state policy, and both states were looked upon in this matter with amused toleration mingled with contempt. Other states for certain periods would enact state-wide statutory prohibition, and many states made it a matter of municipal option. Devoted men and women were agitating the question for three generations, with substantial progress it is true, but nowhere to the extent of securing popular conviction *en masse*.

Suddenly, state after state adopted state-wide prohibition, and with bewildering speed, the country moved on to ratify a prohibitory amendment to the federal constitution, only three of the smaller states failing to ratify. The great cities and the densely settled industrial regions are fairly stunned at what has happened. The most influential part of the press has been on the whole against the amendment. The liquor evil is no worse today than it has been at any time for half a century or more. The workers for national prohibition are on the whole not the same kind of people who figured in earlier days as temperance reformers. What has happened?

It early became evident that progress would be a matter of education, and rather more than a generation ago statutory requirements began to appear in the various states prescribing in all elementary schools, and sometimes in all schools, instruction in the harmful physiological effects of alcohol, tobacco, and narcotics. The instruction was often poor and much of it wildly contrary to the ascertained truth. Still a whole genera-

tion of school children had held up before it the picture of alcohol especially as a destroying influence. The individual effect in most cases was probably comparatively small. Children, as they grew up, in most cases used alcoholic drinks much as they would have without instruction. But the mass effect was tremendous. The typical advocate of national prohibition is a moderate drinker. As the generation which was in school from about 1880 became the dominant generation, almost the only intellectual experience which it had had in common became a mass conviction, and because of the fact that school children reach maturity substantially together, the crystallization of mass conviction was sudden. The prohibition wave has swept over the country in a striking approximation to the amount of time which is required for a single group of children to pass through the school system.

The next instance which I shall use as a reminder is too painfully familiar to require description. I refer to the use made of education, both elementary and higher, by the Prussian state. With devilish efficiency, but without conspicuous pedagogical ingenuity for the attainment of a devilish purpose, a whole nation was made the willing and enthusiastic tool of a barbarous and unscrupulous autocracy.

Finally, I select an instance from our own national life which I admit is not clear. It is however suggestive and it illustrates how the free and easy ways of education in a democracy may produce evil, as well as good, social effects.

Most of you younger people have through all your school lives been indoctrinated with the ideal of service. It was not always so. When those of us who are now in middle life and past middle life were in school, the emphasis of school influence tended to be laid on individual success. There were exceptions made by devoted teachers, but in general, ambitions were stirred and urged on by tales of achievement—the bound-

less opportunities of American life were painted in glowing colors. How often we were told by school directors, in want of a subject for a talk to school children, that any of us boys might become President! It has perhaps taken some of us long to get over the delusions thus created. None of us was worse off to start with than Jackson, or Johnson, or Garfield. The great name of Lincoln was likely to be held out to us, not so much as that of the apostle of human freedom and the clear-eyed savior of the Union, as that of the rail-splitter who became President. The queen of the schoolroom sciences was arithmetic and the crown of arithmetic was dollars and cents.

Now, all this was in itself worthy enough, and very likely to it is to be credited much of the marvelous initiative of the typical American—but note another social effect. The quality which we have to regret perhaps more fundamentally than any other is the intense and often reckless individualism of the dominant generation. It reveals itself in our economic life and creates our chief economic problems. It deprives us of the political service of our strongest men to an extent which is not true of any other nation. To charge it up as an inevitable concomitant of democracy is to deny democracy. I have faith to believe that the splendid spirit of service which is the much more dominant note of the school of today will, within another generation, produce results which will give quite another color to our society.

GENUINE SOCIAL PROGRESS THROUGH EDUCATION

The world is very enthusiastic for social progress today. Even the reactionaries admit that it has to come, and each group is formulating its own program. Marvelous, innumerable schemes are announced for changing human nature by legislation, or even by the expeditious process of killing off the prosperous. The history of progress by such methods is

discouraging. You cannot change human nature except by biological processes beyond our control, but you can enlighten human nature by mass education.

People don't often realize the significance of modern compulsory, universal education. When you put a whole generation to school, as you do, you create a power which is blood brother to the great cosmic forces. The boys and girls who are in school today will hold the balance of power in the elections of a decade and a half hence or less. What you put into the schools today, or what gets into them, will appear in society tomorrow. Designing men may get control and mold society to their own ends. The schools may be allowed to run wild as the notions of individual teachers and administrators dictate their policy. The people may arrive at definite educational convictions and express them in their schools. In that case the society of tomorrow will truly reflect the popular aspirations of today. Steady, sane, genuine, and lasting social progress can come in no other way.

MASS EDUCATION AND LIBERAL EDUCATION

For the sake of clear thinking, it is important that we shall distinguish between two conceptions of the practical use and purpose of educational institutions, both of which are commonly held among us. They are not mutually exclusive in theory but in practice we tend to use only one conception at a time. I shall designate them by the terms "mass education" and "liberal education." The first looks toward the social use of education; the second looks toward the effect upon the individual. The first tends to be definite and practical, though not necessarily vocational; the second tends to be indefinite and to sanction its practices by the vague notion of culture. The reason why we have these two different conceptions is probably to be found in the fact that our institutions are widely diverse in their historical origins. We have been

trying for about three-quarters of a century, without conspicuous success, to make three different kinds of institutions pull in tandem as a single team toward two separate goals, the university and life-work.

It is not an extreme statement to say that we have not yet evolved a clean-cut, all-American conception of institutional education. What we do have is: (1) an elementary school which is a modified German conception; (2) a secondary school and college which serve a single institutional purpose but which are wholly separate in organization and administration, and both of which are deeply rooted in the traditions of English aristocratic education; (3) a university which has thus far been unable to divest itself of secondary work, and at times even of elementary work, and which tends to be full of German notions of procedure and of scholarship.

We have for many years been struggling somewhat uncertainly toward institutions which are clearly and closely American in their adaptation to American life and institutions. Up to date, the net result is a justifiable elementary school of six grades, and that is found only in the more progressive states. You have gone much farther in the West than have we in the East, largely, perhaps, because tradition is not as deeply rooted with you as it is with us, but chiefly because your higher institutions are in the main responsible to the people, and ours in the main are not.

Now, if we are concerned with the integration and rapid development of a highly intelligent, efficient, and happy society in the United States by educational process—and there is no other way by which it can be done—three essential things must be done. First, we must organize two institutions reaching from the twelfth to not later than the twentieth year in the typical individual, each of them justified by the needs and capacities of the growing youth, as found by scientific

investigation rather than by the conclusions of high-school and college politics. Secondly, the typical youth must either be ready for higher professional study at twenty years, or be put in possession of an earning power which will make possible marriage at an early date after leaving school. Thirdly, the programs of the new secondary and the new tertiary institutions must contain large elements very definitely and very concretely related to the kind of society which popular aspirations foreshadow.

Through the product of our higher institutions there must go into society such a body of valid conceptions and methods of thinking that the whole social mass will become capable of constantly adjusting itself to the enormously complex, and very rapidly changing, conditions of modern civilization.

I shall be compelled to limit myself to this third phase of organization, to the program content of higher institutions—the high school and college as they are today.

THE PAST SERVICE OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Up to date, the elementary school has rendered an immense service in the direction of national solidarity, and it might have accomplished even more. It is wholly doubtful that we should have held together as a people during the past four years but for the school of the impressionable pre-adolescent years which has been the substantially common experience of the great mass of the American people. It has placed in the social mass the power, and to a great extent the habit, of reading.

The limitation of the elementary school in the direction of mass education undoubtedly lies in the fact that it cannot communicate the bodies of ideas which are essential to an understanding of the modern world. The pupils are not sufficiently mature, either in experience or in mentality.

MASS EDUCATION AN OBLIGATION UPON THE
HIGHER INSTITUTIONS

For this reason, enormously important as the elementary school will continue to be, the vitally important part of mass education must be done by the higher institutions. It may be that the compulsory school years will soon be extended to eighteen or even later, but in any event the higher schools are capable of powerful indirect mass effect by infiltration.

We already have one good typical set of cases of mass education by infiltration from higher schools. I refer to the effect of a century of physical science teaching. Within a comparatively brief period, the attitude of the mass of the population toward the physical universe was still one of superstition, kindred to that of the stone age. It has not yet entirely disappeared, but one has only to consult the newspaper files of thirty to fifty years ago to become impressed with the change which has taken place within a generation.

What has been accomplished by bringing the light of reason and truth, with respect to the physical universe, within the vision of the masses, can equally well be accomplished by the teaching of biologic and economic and political truth.

REQUIRED COURSES

The elementary school has owed its profound and quick-acting influence upon society to the fact that it acts directly upon all its pupils. Elective courses below the seventh grade are to all intents nil. For the sake of maximum mass effect, it seems evident that certain types of courses in higher institutions, which are now elective, ought to be required. Society has the right to demand that all people who hold the bachelor's degree shall be well-grounded in those studies which are most intimately related to social welfare and progress, and to the safety of our political institutions.

CONTROL IN A DEMOCRACY

If I have made myself at all clear up to this point, I realize that I have been setting up a theory which may be held to bear a likeness to the Prussian theory of subordination of education to the purposes of the state, a theory which is as abhorrent in a democracy as in an autocracy. Not so.

The state must set up the administrative machinery for the establishment and carrying on of schools. The state, as the only institution by which organized society can definitely express itself, may go farther and ordain that certain courses shall be taught. But the moment the state, by legislative or executive act, undertakes to prescribe what is truth and what is not, or to suppress the teaching of the truth, at that moment Prussianism rears its head in exultation.

On the other hand, intellectual anarchy is as bad as intellectual Prussianism. If we cannot abide the suppression of the teaching of the truth, so equally ought we to refuse to abide the instructor's use of his position to expound opinions which have no pretense of established validity. It is outrageous that any youth should be denied the truth, but it is equally a violation of his freedom if in his youth a man shall have been indoctrinated with the peculiar opinions of his teacher.

The democratic principle of control is the ancient democratic maxim, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE OF LIVING ORGANISMS

Of the mass needs of which we have been speaking, I place first a knowledge of the nature of living organisms, which comes through courses in general biology and its related sciences. I think that if all high-school and college graduates could be as thoroughly trained in biology as they now are in mathematics and linguistics, or even in physics and chemistry,

we should presently find that the public mind would become capable of certain socially advantageous reactions of which it is now largely incapable.

Since the progressive thinking of the modern world is largely by the methods of biology, it is important to society that all educated persons should be accustomed to thinking in that way. Very few educated people have ever received biological training. The result is that in social undertakings ranging all the way from high-school methods to the construction of state and federal legislation, educated people are prone to act as if all individuals other than themselves, and society in general, were constructed upon mechanical principles. When you attempt to secure public attention to such matters as education, public health, and social welfare of various necessary kinds, you are likely to find it very difficult to make expert ideas register by reason of the fact that the public mind has no appropriate apperceptive mass.

To draw the illustration closer—there are few social problems above the horizon of which the ultimate solution does not rest in a greater or less degree upon genetics. You approach these problems, you erect palliative measures and you make some progress, but you soon find that you are only getting deeper and deeper into a bottomless pool of expense and effort. There is no solution but in the improvement of the stock. And yet we are appalled at the thought that we should use such intelligence in controlling and eliminating noxious human strains as the husbandman uses in the case of his plants and animals. We cannot bring ourselves to teach our children the truth about life, but leave them to learn it as they may with incalculable harm to the individual and to society. You see the social mind is still biologically superstitious, just as it once was geographically and, much more recently, mechanically superstitious.

Closely related sciences are applied sociology and education. If we are ever to reach a time when the general public will be capable of educational and sociological convictions, our high-school and college graduates must themselves first receive such universal training in the elements of these sciences in order that they might be educationally and sociologically intelligent.

From my own experience and observation as a student of education charged with the administration of educational interests, I have acquired the deliberate conviction that the greatest single obstacle to educational progress is the educated class. Educated men tend to understand only the education which they themselves have received. They are educated, but they themselves are ignorant of the meaning and process of education. They are the leaders of opinion; they insist upon the practices under which they were brought up; they scout the advice of the expert; and then they turn around and score the failures of those whom they are pleased to call educators. Their editorials and magazine articles read precisely like those of the old defenders of "vital fluid," or like those of the old assailants of the doctrine of the sphericity of the earth.

Few educational products of the war are likely to be of more lasting influence than the mental tests and measurements which were carried out in the army and navy. The disclosures, which received considerable publicity, struck the public imagination. People came to realize not merely that people differ greatly in ability, which they already knew, but also that science can give a somewhat definite measure of differences and that differences are more than was suspected. If that part of psychology, in which this material is included, could be made a part of the equipment of the college graduate, it would go far toward convincing us all that we really do differ in mental ability, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In

time, the knowledge diffused among the masses of the population would help to dissipate several political superstitions which came to us from the French Revolution, and the result would work toward the furtherance of true democracy.

And so, I think, required courses of considerable extent in general biology, with shorter courses in education and applied sociology and psychology, ought to be one of the main supports of the program of the secondary school and college.

APPRECIATION OF NATURAL LAW IN THE ECONOMIC WORLD

The study of economics has been almost neglected in the high school and it is seldom a required subject in college. The result is that there is little appreciation among the masses of the population of the reign of natural law in the economic world. As always in such cases, the attitude of the general public, including a great part of the educated public, is one of superstition, easily influenced by demagogues on the one hand, and by the vagaries of well-meaning but uninformed and untrained visionaries on the other.

The world finds itself in one of its great economic crises, with political power in the hands of the masses, and the masses without the guiding power of ascertained truth widely known to them.

Nor do we need to go to Russia for instances. In our own country we have fallen very deeply into the primitive economic error of supposing that we can create wealth out of nothing. Rich and poor, labor and capital alike, combine among themselves to force up their income to meet the cost of a standard of expensive living, only to find that they must do it again and again and never with any substantial and permanent advantage, happy in the folly of believing that wealth can be produced by agreement, by legislation, by executive decree.

If the war between labor and capital is ever settled at all, short of the complete wreck of western civilization, it will be

settled because both sides learn economic truth and are both compelled by their knowledge and conviction of the reign of natural law in the economic world.

Let us turn to the other side, the side of applied political economy. Governments, federal, state, and municipal, have to use wealth in the performance of their functions and the wealth which they use is secured mainly by taxation. Taxes are, in the last analysis, levied, or at least sanctioned, by the voting power of the people. There is a limit to the amount which even the most willing can tax themselves. It is in the highest degree important that there shall be diffused among the masses of the population some understanding of the nature of taxation and some realization of the principle that the taxing power of the government is not a fairy's wand by which wealth for government use can be created. The need will be very much greater in the future than it has been hitherto, for the cost of the war has put an end, perhaps forever, to the happy-go-lucky taxation of the past.

And so, I think that effective required courses in economics ought to be found throughout our high-school and college programs, beginning as early as the seventh grade.

A KNOWLEDGE OF THE NATURE OF GOVERNMENT AND OF THE AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

I reserve the most important obligation of higher institutions of learning to the education of the masses until the end. That obligation I conceive to be the indoctrination of high-school and college students with an understanding of the nature of government itself, and particularly with an understanding of that form of democratic government which has grown up among the English-speaking peoples, and which is still in process of evolution in our own nation.

I include the study of the nature of government advisedly. During the past four years the constant presentation of a war

against autocracy seems to have built up a veritable popular obsession. To an amazing extent, even among highly educated people—our parlor Bolsheviks, for instance—there seems to have been conceived the notion that any government is autocracy.

We are confronted, for instance, with the political enormity widely advocated even by some of our most influential journals that freedom has been destroyed in the case of the eighteenth amendment. You may think as you will about the wisdom of prohibition, but it argues a vital misconception of civil liberty if you hold that the regular, lawful, constitutional exercise of authority by the legislatures of forty-five states can impair the blessings of liberty under the law.

In widely separated parts of the country, even bodies of teachers have more or less succeeded in convincing the public that the lawful representatives of the whole people, in boards of education, or even in state legislatures, cannot justly adopt regulations or enact laws without first consulting and securing the permission of the teaching class. That is not democracy, but rather sovietism.

In short, we have before us a situation which argues a very considerable loss of political sense. So far as this situation exists, it exemplifies the forebodings of the founders of the republic that their work could not last except on the basis of popular education. They saw, or at least some of them did, that there is no capacity toward self-governing societies which is inherent in human nature, but rather that people can govern themselves only as they learn how. It is ridiculous to assume that the indefinite accomplishment implied in the term education can assure political competency. A man is politically educated only when he has acquired a knowledge and understanding of the principles of government. And many a backwoods town-officer has a better political education than many educated people.

How then has political education failed to keep pace with our national growth?

In the first place, we have absorbed a very large population which, however great its yearning for freedom, has not the social heritage of working democracy which is the possession of the original population and their descendants.

Secondly, informal political education is not nearly as widespread as it once was. In the early days, and for perhaps three generations afterward, the conditions of American life were such that a peculiarly efficient informal political education was going on all the time. The primary assembly held a much larger place than now. The problems arising out of the period of constitutional development reaching from 1787 to 1865 and after were acute, they were of universal interest, and they were essentially political and not, as now, overshadowed by economic elements.

Meantime, somebody, presumably the Genius of Misrule, had invented the city government, the one political institution which we, as a people, have thus far failed to understand.

During the whole period, our higher schools have given but scant attention to the study of our political institutions. And so it is not surprising that in the generation born during and soon after the Civil War, and particularly in the newer generation which is just now coming to maturity, there should be a great deal of political ignorance and indifference.

What have we in the schools today?

In the first place, we have almost everywhere, in the elementary and secondary schools, civil government, but in a position and with a time allowance greatly inferior to those assigned to mathematics, or linguistics, or physical science, or history. A very considerable number of high-school graduates are expected to know more about the civil government which was operated by consuls than about that which is operated by mayors and governors. But at the best, civil government is

merely a study of the machinery of government. It nowhere gets at the fundamentals of democratic government, or of the institutions which are calculated to guarantee civil liberty under the law, or of the nature and limitations of liberty itself.

We also profess to teach citizenship, or at least to inculcate the civil and social virtues. But citizenship is a term as broad in its connotations as good moral character. You can't teach good citizenship except as you teach a multitude of elements which enter into good citizenship, much of which is of course done.

The schools have been beyond praise in their successful inculcation of patriotism, but patriotism is not necessarily good citizenship nor political understanding.

There remain college courses in political science, usually well calculated for the purpose which we have in mind, but for the most part they are elective and are taken chiefly by prospective law students.

It seems to be needful to bring back into our common life by institutional means the understanding and knowledge of Anglo-Saxon democracy and particularly of its American developments which were once constantly replenished by the informal education of current events. Specifically, I mean those institutions of civil liberty and constitutional government which were vindicated in the struggles of our ancestors with the Stuart kings, and which were extended and applied to the needs of a democratic society spread over a continent during the first century of our national life. The data for such studies are to be found in the constitutional history of our race, and particularly in the decisions of our courts of last resort.

It is needful that our people shall everywhere be indoctrinated with a clear understanding of the principle that liberty under the law is the only possible freedom; that the rights of every man are strictly conditioned by the equal rights of his

neighbor; that the hateful essence of autocracy is personal government just as much in America as in Germany, and that its antithesis is not anarchy but the reign of law; that free government is government by Lincoln's immortal formula; and that soviet government, whether by proletariat or plutocracy, whether recognized or invisible, is more abominable than even autocracy. For this purpose we need first-class required courses in high school and college.

I am not of those who believe that political democracy has yet reached its final expression, but it seems to me very clear that free institutions develop only as each advance is rooted in popular knowledge of the earlier growth. It is the peculiar glory of the men of the English-speaking race that they never have had a revolution of the French or Russian type, and yet it is upon our institutions that the free governments of the rest of the world have been patterned. With all our faults, with all our admitted and sometimes discouraging failures, we should still be sorry to exchange our democracy for any of those which have grown out of revolutions.